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# New Nigerian jihadist group declared terrorists

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BBC News, Abuja



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Self-defence groups have been formed to help fight militant groups

Nigeria's authorities have officially declared the Lakurawa armed group - which flogs people for listening to music - a terrorist organisation and banned it across the country.

Lakurawa is a new militant group which carries out attacks, targeting local communities in north-western Nigeria and across the border with Niger.

Nigerian officials say Lakurawa is affiliated with jihadist factions in Mali and Niger, and its militants have for years settled in communities along the Nigeria-Niger border, marrying local women and recruiting youths.

This adds to Nigeria's security concerns, as it is already fighting against several armed groups, from Islamist militants Boko Haram to kidnapping gangs.

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The Nigerian government submitted a document to a High Court in the capital, Abuja, on Thursday, detailing the activities of the group.

It said Lakurawa had been involved in acts of terrorism, including cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, hostage-taking and attacks on top government officials.

The group was also accused of spreading harmful ideology within local communities and encouraging locals to disregard authorities, "resulting in injuries, and loss of lives and property to innocent citizens of Nigeria".

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The group emerged few years ago in some villages in Sokoto and Kebbi states and people had notified authorities of its existence but nothing was done.

At first, Lakurawa members promised to tackle banditry and help protect local people from cattle thieves.

"But things escalated when they started asking to check people's phones and would flog those that have music in them before deleting them," one Sokoto resident told the BBC last year.

In the court papers, Nigeria's Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Lateef Fagbemi said the group's activities posed a serious threat to national security.

Last year, military spokesperson Maj Gen Edward Buba said the emergence of Lakurawa was directly linked to political instability in neighbouring Mali and Niger.

The military has seized power in both countries, partly because of the pressure of an Islamist insurgency.

In a swift decision, Justice James Omotosho declared the group "a terrorist organisation and extended the ban to similar groups across Nigeria, with a specific focus on the North West and North Central regions".

This move will give the Nigerian government sweeping powers to take strong actions against the group.

Security agencies now have broad mandates to disrupt and dismantle the group's operations, including arrests, prosecution, asset freezes, and increased surveillance.

It could also lead to public stigma and isolation for individuals associated with the designated group.

Across the country, especially in northern Nigeria, people fear another scenario similar to when Boko Haram emerged in the late 2000s.

Boko Haram means "Western education is forbidden", and it has repeatedly targeted secular schools as part of its attempts to establish its version of Islamic rule in the region.

The group gained notoriety internationally when it kidnapped more than 200 school girls from the north-eastern town of Chibok in 2014.

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